

**COORDINATED
PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION
&
HUMAN SERVICES
TRANSPORTATION PLAN
BEAUFORT & MARTIN COUNTIES
MARCH 2010**

II. INTRODUCTION

1. Federal Regulatory Background

For more than twenty years, the federal government has been working to better coordinate human service transportation activities it funds.

In 1985, during an oversight hearing on Rural Transportation, Congress heard testimony prompted by concerns of the lack of federal coordination between programs, such as the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the Department of Transportation (DOT).

Aiming to better coordinate activities, the Secretaries of HHS and DOT signed an agreement establishing the Joint DOT/HHS Coordinating Council on Human Service Transportation (CCHST) in 1986. Since the CCHST's creation, the CCHST has concentrated efforts to identify barriers to coordinated transportation. At one time, the agencies identified sixty-four factors that transportation and human service representatives believed were barriers to transportation coordination. Barriers included uncertainty regarding federal responsibilities for transportation, fragmented accounting and reporting procedures, uncertainty in using resources for recipients other than program constituents, and prohibition against charging fares under the Older Americans Act.

To further support coordination, Congress included several provisions in its 1998 passage of the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA -21), Public Law (PL) 105- 178. Most notable was the provision to require Job Access and Reverse Commute (JARC), predecessor program to today's JARC program, projects to be part of a coordinated public transit-human services transportation planning process. In February 2004, President George W. Bush released an Executive Order on Human Service Transportation Coordination to improve assistance to those who are transportation disadvantaged. The Executive Order aims to implement coordination of transportation services to operate in the most cost effective and time efficient manner possible.

Within the February 2004 Executive Order, the President established the Interagency Transportation Coordinating Council on Access and Mobility (CCAM).

The functions of the CCAM are to:

- Promote interagency cooperation
- Establish appropriate mechanisms to minimize duplication and overlap of federal programs and services so that transportation-disadvantaged persons have access to more transportation services
- Facilitate access to the most appropriate, cost-effective transportation services within existing resources
- Encourage enhanced customer access to the variety of transportation and resources available
- Formulate and implement administrative, policy, and procedural mechanisms that enhance transportation services at all levels

CCAM includes leadership from eleven federal departments:

- DOT
- HHS
- Labor
- Education
- Housing and Urban Affairs
- Agriculture
- Justice
- Interior
- Veterans Administration
- Social Security Administration
- National Council on Disabilities

In May 2005, the CCAM issued a report to the President with recommendations for breaking down federal barriers to transportation for all transportation-disadvantaged populations. The report detailed action plans for each of the eleven federal agencies who comprise the CCAM. Additionally, in 2005 the CCAM launched the United We Ride website, www.unitedweride.gov.

While it has been a long process, the federal government is working to strengthen its coordination requirements for human service transportation activities. In August 2005, Congress included coordination provisions in the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, and Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU), PL 109-059. SAFETEA-LU specifically added a coordination requirement to the newly created Elderly Individuals and Individuals with Disabilities Program (5310), Job Access Reverse Commute Program (5316), and New Freedoms Program (5317). FTA requires projects funded through the Section 5310, 5316, and 5317 Programs be derived from a locally developed Coordinated Human Service Transportation Plan (CPT-HSTP).

A CPT-HSTP identifies the transportation needs of individuals with disabilities, older adults, and people with low incomes. It provides strategies for meeting local needs, and prioritizes transportation services for funding and implementation. A CPT-HSTP uses all available resources to supply transportation services efficiently and without redundancy in trips. Development of the CPT-HSTP must have the input and cooperation of transit agencies, social service agencies, community agencies, and the public.

In 2006, the CCAM issued two policy statements that take important steps to bring federal programs together to help people with disabilities, older adults, and lower income families get the transportation they need for their day-to-day mobility.

The CCAM policy statements focus on two key areas: (1) coordinated human service transportation planning and (2) vehicle sharing. These policies support communities and organizations receiving federal funding to plan transportation services together and to share resources. The policies were included as part of the recommendations in a 2005 report to the White House on Human Service Transportation Coordination. Each department on the CCAM will be taking actions to implement these policies.

2. Federal Funding Programs

SAFETEA-LU requires that projects selected for funding under the Elderly Individuals and Individuals with Disabilities (5310), JARC (5316), and New Freedom (5317) programs be derived from a locally developed coordinated transportation plan and that the plan be developed through a process that includes representative from the public, private, and non-profit transportation and human service providers and the public. The NC Department of Transportation (NCDOT), Public Transportation Division was designated by the Governor in April 2008 to administer both the small urban and non-urbanized area apportionment of funds to North Carolina. The applications for the three competitive grants are reviewed by a project selection committee consisting of representatives from the Public Transportation Division. The selection committee utilizes pre-determine project evaluation criteria to score each application. Those with the highest score receive the available funding. Grants are awarded for a two year period.

A brief description of the programs and examples of eligible projects for each are:

1. Job Access Reverse Commute (JARC)

The JARC program has existed under previous transportation legislation - the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21). SAFETEA-LU has changed the funding from an earmark to a formula program based on the number of low-income individuals in the urbanized area. JARC was created to help address the transportation needs of unemployed and underemployed persons trying to access jobs. Public transit primarily serves people within a central urban area; however entry-level jobs often are created in the suburbs. Previously funded JARC projects that are able to document success will be eligible for funding.

New projects must relate to the development and maintenance of transportation services designed to transport welfare recipients and eligible low-income clients to and from jobs and activities related to their employment. Examples of eligible projects include:

- Public transit late-night and weekend service.
- Public transit guaranteed ride home program expanding fixed-route transit routes
- Vanpools or shuttle services to improve access to employment or training
- Car loan programs that assist individuals in purchasing and maintaining vehicles
- Promotion of public transit for non-traditional work schedules
- Voucher programs targeted to persons entering the workforce or on welfare

2. New Freedom

The New Freedom Program is a newly created program under SAFETEA-LU. The purpose of New Freedom is to expand transportation services beyond what is required for the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) for the elderly and persons with disabilities. New Freedom projects must be new transportation service, defined as not being provided as of August 10, 2005. Examples of eligible projects include:

- Expansion of paratransit service beyond the ¾ mile required by ADA

- Expansion of current hours of operation for paratransit services that are beyond those provided on fixed route services
- Same day ADA service
- Door-through-door service-provision of escorts
- Purchasing vehicles for new accessible taxi, ride sharing and/or vanpool programs
- New voucher programs offered by human service providers
- New volunteer driver and aide programs
- Operational planning for the purchase of intelligent transportation technologies

3. Elderly Persons and Persons with Disabilities (Section 5310)

This program existed under the previous transportation legislation. The 5310 program provides funds for capital costs associated with providing services to older adults and people with disabilities. Additional requirements under SAFETEA-LU include the provision that projects funded under this program must be included in a locally-developed human service transportation coordination plan. North Carolina is one of seven states that are authorized to use up to one-third of the annual statewide allocation for operating costs. Examples of eligible projects include:

- Purchase of service (POS): the acquisition of transportation service under a purchase of service contract with a public transportation provider
- Vehicles
- Mobility managers and related activities
- Radio and communication equipment
- Vehicle shelters
- Wheelchair lifts and restraints
- Computer hardware and software

II. Plan Approach

Projects funded through the Job Access and Reverse Commute (Section 5316 - JARC) and New Freedom (Section 5317) programs require the development of a local, coordinated public transit-human services transportation plan (CPT-HSTP), which should incorporate private and non-profit transportation and human services providers and the general public.

Completing the planning process required the participation of many organizations and agencies and the creation of a planning team. The following organizations comprised the planning team:

- Mid-East Rural Planning Organization
- Public Transportation Division of North Carolina Department of Transportation
- Mid-East Area Agency on Aging
- Beaufort County Area Transit (BATS)
- Martin County Transit (MCT)

The coordinated plan's development will, at a minimum:

- Assess and document transportation needs in the region for individuals with disabilities, older adults, and persons with limited incomes;
- Inventory available services in the region and identify areas of redundancy and gaps in service;
- Identify and document restrictions on eligibility for funding;

- Identify and document short- and long-range strategies in the region to address the identified gaps in service, including mobility management strategies;
- Identify and document technological resources currently available and appropriate for coordination of transportation services;
- Identify and document coordination actions in each region to eliminate or reduce duplication in services and strategies for more efficient utilization of resources; and
- Document and prioritize implementation strategies to increase coordination of transportation services in the region.

The stakeholders met in March 2010 to review the draft plan and to gather input from the stakeholders from the three counties in the RPO. In the workshops, the stakeholders and the public identified needs and gaps in the current public transportation service areas. Ideas were also presented to improve the overall efficiencies of the systems. The results of the workshops are the foundation for the CP-HST which will guide the application and project selection process.

The following stakeholders were invited to participate in the steering committee and public meetings:

BEAUFORT COUNTY

Beaufort County Developmental Center
 Beaufort County Department of Social Services
 Beaufort County Council on Aging
 Vocational Rehabilitation
 Beaufort County Art Council
 Beaufort County Blind Center
 Options
 Eagles Wings
 Beaufort County Partnership for Children
 Joblinks Center
 Beaufort Memorial Hospital
 AGAPE Community Health Clinic
 Marion L. Sheppard Cancer Center
 Belhaven County Senior Center
 Aurora Senior Center

MARTIN COUNTY

Martin County Developmental Center
 Martin County Department of Social Services
 Martin County Department of Aging
 Vocational Rehabilitation
 BHM Library
 Martin County Art Council
 Martin County Center for the Blind
 B.M.B. Shelter Home
 Martin County Veterans Affairs/Services
 Martin Community College

Martin County Community Foundation

3. Demographics of the Mid-East RPO (By County)

Although not included in the plan the demographics for Pitt County are included

	median age 2007*	% over age 65(2007)*	Persons in Poverty/%**	Persons Disabled**	Households no Vehicles***
Beaufort	40.79	16.5%	7,641/16.6%	10,321	726
Martin	39.85	15.8%	4,632/19.8%	6,383	485
Pitt	32.09	9.7%	35,118/22.5%	24,400	1225

*Estimates from Office of State Budget and Management **Census 2000

V. Needs Assessment

A facilitated workshop method was used to identify perceived needs, gaps, and barriers in the existing systems. A stakeholder workshop was held at 9:00am on March 10, 2010 at Beaufort County Community College, North Carolina. It involved participants working in teams to complete the Framework for Action survey to assess the status of transportation services within the 2 county region. The teams identified and discussed service needs, gaps, and barriers and recorded them for discussions that would follow.

Each group then presented the identified issues and an opportunity to review each group's list of service gaps was provided. Duplicate input was accepted, and encouraged. Participants who had difficulties using this method were paired with team members who could assist them. It is important to note that some of the perceived needs, gaps, or barriers that were identified were largely consistent across the region and across agencies. Some other issues identified may have workable solutions in place, and their identification may more correctly reflect a lack of knowledge about services available through public and community transportation systems.

A major focus of developing a coordinated transportation plan is public input, more specifically stakeholder involvement. The primary objective of this plan is to encourage public transportation coordination and, provide a network of diverse stakeholders with a common interest in human service transportation the opportunity to collaborate on how to best provide transportation services to the targeted populations identified in the three programs noted above.

Stakeholder outreach and participation is key to the development of the plan. Guidance issued by FTA and the NCDOT specifically requires participation and recommends that it is inclusive, representing a broad spectrum of groups and organizations involved in human service transportation. Participants in the plan development process are listed in the Plan Approach Section.

The Coordinated Plan is focused on identifying the most significant unmet transportation needs or service gaps faced by transportation-disadvantaged individuals. These unmet needs were substantiated by facilitating the United We Ride: A Framework for Action initiative during the stakeholder meeting. See *Appendix A: Framework for Action*. Participants conducted an assessment of current public transportation providers, including private and nonprofit providers, and identified public transportation needs. Participants identified areas where service is needed to meet the needs of people with limited incomes, the elderly, and persons with disabilities.

The following is a summary of needs, gaps, and barriers identified through the stakeholder workshop breakout groups. Note that some comments are duplicative, but reflects input from each of the three breakout groups.

- Creating a One Call Center
- Cost Barriers – funding for agencies or provider
- Communication – Utilize public access channel, power point updating schedules, program contacts
- Extend hours of service to 24/7/365 – will need more equipment and drivers
- Travel time – utilize more equipment and drivers to reduce for bus and van service
- Time barrier and flexibility of schedules – scheduled routes may not meet needs of passengers
- Communication - Internal and External
- Operational hours matching major employers
- Projected transportation needs to meet projected growth
- Need for more bus shelters
- Need more equipment and personal for service area expansion and additional service hours
- Expanded service to Community College
- Lack of seamless transportation
- More available stops
- Expanded night/weekend service
- Knowledge of available services and understanding on how to use services
- Education of riders and system responsibilities
- Wait times before and after appointments – pick up times
- Vouchers to reduce cost of service for low-income community. Especially elderly & disabled citizens
- Public awareness – need to educate the community on available services and how to utilize transportation
- Agency Coordination
- All people who can influence ridership are uninformed or misinformed
- Lack of support from public officials
- Housing and locations – need more vehicles and personnel for expansion to low income areas of the county to better serve needs
- Fear of people to ask for help or take advantage of service
- Physical barriers – passengers not able to get to bus stops or out of house
- Language barriers
- More services for elderly and disabled populations – extend hours of operations
- Environmental Barriers - No sidewalks or crosswalks at bus stops
- Lack of information from agencies and organizations on transportation for disabled, elderly and low income
- Non-Human Service Agency clients – cost of transportation – insufficient funding
- Universal Fare Cards – works for all systems
- Accessibility features – lower steps and handicap features
- Quality of service – more equipment, more vans, especially for elderly even if not in a wheelchair
- Transportation to institutes of higher learning that are consistent with class schedules
- Car seats – make available on designated vehicles
- No coordination with surrounding counties

- Better marketing/publicity
- Door to Door service vs. Curb to Curb for disabled and elderly clients who need additional Assistance
- Information available in various forms – signage/color-coding/LEP/Braille
- Driver training – sensitivity to passenger needs and safety

VI. PRIORITIZATION OF NEEDS

A set of strategies and related project actions will help to address the unmet needs and fill the gaps in human service transportation. Each group narrowed its strategies and activities to develop their top 3 priorities. Needs were prioritized using a dot vote scheme in which each workshop attendee was given five dots with which to express what issues were most important to them. Attendees could allocate the dots as they chose but not more than one dot per strategy or activity. The recommended priority actions are shown at the end of this section. Project proposals for funding under any of the three FTA programs will need to address at least one of the strategies or activities listed below. In developing strategies and actions to address unmet needs, some projects will have a greater overall impact on unmet needs than others and are thus a greater priority for funding.

- One Call Center
- Quality of service – more equipment, more vans, especially for elderly even if they are not in a wheelchair
- Cost Barriers – funding for agencies or provider
- Environmental Barriers – Need more sidewalks at bus stops
- Wait times before and after pick ups
- Communication – Utilize public access channel, power point, updating schedules, programs, contacts
- Universal fare card/Electronic swipe card system
- Van/Car pool program for employment access
- Park & Ride Lots
- Expand service area for GREAT Bus System
- Universal Information Center to give out information on how to get from Point A to Point B –
- Operating hours expanded to 24/7/365
- Better marketing of Area Transit Systems
- Communication – Internal and External County wide
- Door to Door service vs. Curb to Curb for disabled and elderly clients who need additional service
- Knowledge of available services and understanding on how to use services by agencies and riders
- Voucher/tickets for emergency trips – express service on non 911 calls
- Restricted transit systems – ECU, GREAT
- Educate communities about transit system
- Increase staff and equipment for more flexibility in scheduling appointments
- 15 minute intervals for bus and van service
- Reduce travel time on bus or van
- Time Barrier and flexibility of schedules – scheduled routes may not meet needs of passengers
- Driver training – sensitivity to passenger needs and safety
- Education of riders and system responsibilities

The listing in the section above is arranged by expressed priority within each category. Since only the issues identified at a specific workshop were available for voting at that workshop, not all identified issues were considered by all voters, and since each voter could only choose up to five issues as "most important," there were many ties within categories.

The following identifies the outcome of the service strategies and activities prioritization exercise as expressed by each of the seven breakout groups/teams as most important. Duplications in the list were combined to make priorities as all-encompassing as possible.

1st Priority

- More Employment Transportation routes
- Quality of service – more equipment, more vans, more personnel - especially accessible vans for elderly & disabled even if they are not in wheelchairs
- Comprehensive public awareness and education including, but not limited to Human Service
- Agencies, transportation providers, communities, local officials and system riders of their roles and responsibilities in the use of transit and the transit system's roles and responsibilities to the users and providers.
- Use of voucher tickets to reduce cost to low-income community-especially elderly & disabled citizens

2nd Priority

- Strategic marketing of Area Transit Systems
- Need more equipment and personnel for service area expansion and additional service hours especially for elderly and disabled populations
- Universal Information Center

3rd Priority

- 15 minute intervals for bus and van service
- Enhance coordination with surrounding counties
- Driver Training – sensitivity to passenger needs and safety

4th Priority

- Shorter wait times before and after appointments
- Operating hours expanded to 24/7/365
- One Call Center through partnership with Intermodal Center

5th Priority

- Expand service area for GREAT Bus system
- Park and Ride Lots
- Electronic swipe cards/Universal fare cards

Funding applications for the three programs covered by this plan must address the above service and activity priorities based upon eligible activities for each program.

VII. SUMMARY

Many of the invited stakeholders assisted in developing the coordinated plan for the 2 county area. The plan follows the required steps:

- Assess available services (public, private and nonprofit).
- Identify transportation needs for individuals with disabilities, older adults and people with low incomes.

- Develop strategies and/or activities to address the identified gaps and achieve efficiencies, where possible, in service delivery.
- Identify priorities for implementing the strategy/activities based on resources, time, and feasibility for implementation.

Upon approval, the plan will serve as document that will support future requests for funding targeted at the low income, elderly persons and disabled individuals who reside in the region.

As the designated lead transportation provider in Beaufort and Martin Counties the Beaufort Area Transit System and the Martin County Transit System are familiar with the federal and state rules, laws and regulations pertaining to USDOT's funding programs. Fund metrics will be developed for each of the programs upon award of a grant. Quarterly and annual performance and financial reporting is required. Furthermore, the programs must be implemented consistent with federal and state policies, rules and regulations and with the NCDOT State Management Plan for the Sections 5310, 5311, 5316 and 5317 Programs.